

Lesson Plan: Relevant Ideas and Essential Questions

DRAFT Lesson Plan in support of the *Relevant Ideas and Essential Questions* Competency
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Introduction:

With the National Park Service being the interpreters and preservers of our natural and cultural heritage and with the globalization of society, it is time for us to look beyond our sites and even regional boundaries and begin to address questions and issues that, while inherent in our sites, also have a more broad social relevance. These Essential Questions will form a basis for 21st century interpretation.

Studies have also shown that society is moving away from static learning in which a subject matter expert imparts knowledge in a lecture format towards a more self-directed, interactive learning model. By using Essential Questions based on thematic relevant ideas, park interpreters will be able to better engage the modern visitor through collaborative learning experiences which will encourage visitors to form their own personal connections to site resources and meanings.

Goal for this Lesson Plan:

To present the concept of how to introduce the use of Essential Questions into the construction of interpretive products

Objectives:

- By the end of this session, participants will be able to list at least three characteristics of an essential question.
- By the end of this session, participants will be able to describe how to use heritage resources as catalysts to explore and investigate questions and ideas essential to today's society.
- By the end of this session, participants will be able to describe an advantage of allowing audiences to cooperatively shape interpretive experiences through contribution of content and meanings.
- Within a week after this session, participants will be able to apply their understanding of the resource, audience and the broader social context by beginning to construct a goal-driven program which develops relevant ideas and essential questions which address the needs/interests of the audience, the site/agency, and the broader needs of society.
- Within a week after this session, participants will be able to begin to develop interpretive experiences with purposeful focus and structure that can be tailored to audience interests and input through collaborative learning.

Part1 Shaping Interpretive Experiences Using Relevant Ideas and Essential Questions

Why? What is the advantage of allowing audiences to cooperatively shape interpretive experiences through contribution of content and meanings using Relevant Ideas and Essential Questions? (25 minutes including video)

Learner Centered Method: auditory and visual

Talk about the reasons and advantages for having audiences co-create experiences

- Explore personal relevance, encourages resource preservation, drives toward the broader outcome of a just and healthy planet.
- Natural and cultural heritage sites provide ideal forums for exploring relevant ideas and essential questions facing today's society.
- Meaningful dialogue in which audiences express and experience multiple perspectives.
- The goal is not to change minds, but to consider new points of view.
- Thoughtful questions to invite dialogue, foster awareness and encourage collaborative solutions.
- A cohesive experience for the audience is achieved by allowing exploration of an essential question or relevant idea to unfold around or within a purposeful interpretive focus or framework

Activity: Watch Nina Simone Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=177&v=aIcwIH1vZ9w

Part 2 Characteristics of Essential Questions. What defines an Essential Question (15 minutes)

Learner Centered Method: auditory, visual, kinesthetic

Activity 1: Review short PowerPoint "RI &EQs Examples" with examples from interpretive programs (see below). Refer back to questions that were discussed during movie exercise.

An essential question:

- is intriguing, complex, and problematic
- serves as a framework that promotes interest, critical thinking, and compels discussion
- cannot be easily solved or answered
- expresses broad social relevance
- is a question of genuine perplexity to you
- may be used as a framework in which to raise more questions
- is a real-world dilemma that your site speaks to
- is unbiased and open-ended

Activity 2: In pairs or triads, brainstorm essential questions for one's own site. Write on the whiteboard.

Part 3 What is a Relevant Idea and How might it Relate to Essential Questions

(45 minutes)

Learner Centered Method: kinesthetic, auditory

Choose 3-4 recent, popular movies which most people likely saw. For each movie, have students write what they personally found as the Relevant Idea (theme?). After giving students a few minutes to write their thoughts down, have students share and write on a whiteboard. Students will discover that not everyone found the same Relevant Idea, just as audience members may not find the same relevant idea in an interpretive program.

Titanic example:

"Love conquers all." "Never stop trying." "Take chances." Others?

Have the class choose one of the relevant ideas.

Brainstorm how that idea might be turned into an Essential Question.

- Is there anything universal in the relevant idea?
- How might this be turned into a question with no right answers which an audience might discuss and explore further?

Titanic example:

What is true love? Is there such a thing as true love? Does social class matter? In what ways might *pride* influence one's decisions?

Do the same with Movies 2 and 3 as needed.

This exercise has allowed us to explore essential/relevant questions together, rather than me, the instructor presenting a static theme-based product to you, the audience. All interpreters should be moving in this direction by using essential questions.

Part 4 Connecting with the Audience Interests/Needs (15 minutes)

Learner Centered Method: auditory

Audience Profile:

What audiences is the park interacting with currently?

Who is visiting?

Who are the partners?

Who are the stakeholders?

As an interpreter out in the field, you can have informal discussions with audiences at the VC, while roving and as you co-create experiences with your audience to learn more about their interests and needs.

Part 5 Heritage Resources as Catalysts to Explore and Investigate Questions and Ideas Essential to Today's Society

Learner Centered Method: auditory, visual, kinesthetic

[Distribute site significance statements/Interp. themes.]

Activity 1: Read out loud or silently.

Example:

Site Significance Statement:

Virgin Islands National Park and Virgin Islands Coral Reef National Monument 32 collectively preserve an exceptional array of prehistoric and historic sites that continue to 33 define the human interaction and history unique to the Caribbean region. The cultural 34 heritage of the diverse peoples that inhabited the islands speaks to today's visitors, from the 35 first inhabitants to the prominent colonial powers and the African slave trade.

Interp. Theme:

Virgin Islands National Park provides a setting for exploring the experience of enslaved Africans, and learning about the layers of history and patterns of change within the institution of slavery over time.

Current Issues:

Racial Tensions

Black Lives Matter Movement

Broader Needs of Society:

racial inequality is still a reality in our society.

Activity 2: Work in pairs to discuss and write down how site significance of their site may relate to audience interest, current issues and broader needs of society. Share these with larger group.

Part 6 Essential Questions from Theme Statements

Over the past several decades we have been using thematic interpretation to help visitors form intellectual and emotional connections by developing a relevant idea that links a resource to its intangible meanings.

Perhaps, by looking inside the theme statement and exploring the essential questions within it, we will be able to help ever more diverse audiences form these personal connections.

Activity:

In pairs or triads, choose a theme you or someone else has used previously in an interpretive program. Brainstorm with the others in your group what essential questions this program or a program based on this theme might explore. Report back to the whole group.

Examples:

Theme: It takes real survival skills and strategies for plants and animals to live on a barrier island.

EQs: What does “survival” mean in our modern world?
How can we share the planet -- with other humans and other species -- when competing for survival with limited resources?

Theme: Storytelling connects us to family and culture.

EQs: What does culture mean to you? Is your culture important to you?
Is it important to preserve our culture?

Theme: The Grand Canyon provides everything the California Condor needs for survival.

EQs: How important is the survival of other species?
What is our responsibility toward protecting other species?
Could humans become endangered?

Theme: The Castillo de San Marcos is a symbol of Spanish colonialism in the New World.

EQs: What does the term “colonialism” mean to us today?
Do conquering nations have a responsibility to the conquered?

Part 7 Wrap up: (15 minutes)

Give each person a slip of paper with either an essential or non- essential question.

Have them identify if their question is or is not essential and explain why or why not

Resources:

RI & EQ Examples Power Point – make slides or handouts from the following examples:

Essential (theme) questions are...

- intriguing, complex, and problematic
- serve as a framework that promotes interest, critical thinking, and compels discussion
- cannot be easily solved or answered
- express broad social relevance
- a question of genuine perplexity to you
- a framework in which to raise more questions
- a real-world dilemma that your site speaks to
- unbiased and open-ended



- *What does it mean to live with other species, or to have them go extinct?*
- *How does a culture measure the value of a landscape?*
- *What is the meaning of freedom?*
- *As humans, how can we find a balance between human access to natural spaces versus preserving those spaces for future generations?*



- *Is 'nature' worth preserving and what is the cost?"*
- *In today's world, how does the state of our borders affect the development of cultural identity?*
- *How can we honor our shared heritage and continue to build a vibrant community?*
- *How do we share resources when demand is greater than supply?*

Additional Resources for Relevant Ideas and Essential Questions:

ACPS Professional Learning-- Classroom in Focus. (n.d.). "Essential Questions"
<http://www.acpsk12.org/pl/acps-classrooms-in-focus/essential-questions/>

This web article includes videos showing the use of essential questions in primary and secondary classrooms and also lists several resources on the topic.

Global Digital Citizen Foundation. (2015). "How to Use Essential Questions in the Classroom".
<https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/how-to-use-essential-questions-in-the-classroom>

This web article explains the use of essential questions in the classroom.

Huff, Dana. (2007). "Understanding by Design: Essential Questions"
<http://www.huffenglish.com/understanding-by-design-essential-questions/>

This web article debunks several misunderstandings of what essential questions are.

National Park Service. (2014). Vision Paper: 21st Century Interpretive Skills.
<http://www.nps.gov/resources/upload/REPORT-Interpretative-Skills-05-22-14.pdf>

Regis University. (n.d.). "Lesson and Unit Planning Sites".
https://cpslearning.regis.edu/ed_lesson_plan/planning_templates.html

This website contains links and templates for lesson plans using essential questions.

Wiggins & McTigh. (2005). *Understanding by Design*. Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development; 2nd Expanded edition.

The late Grant Wiggins has been known by many as the Father of the Essential Question. This book discusses the concept and describes its use in creating dynamic learning in the classroom.

Wiggins, Grant. (2013). "On genuine vs. bogus inquiry – using EQs properly"
<https://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/2013/02/08/on-genuine-vs-bogus-inquiry-using-eqs-properly/>

This web article by "the father of the essential question" explains the use of EQs in the real world and gives examples.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. (n.d.). "Essential Questions".
<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/essential-questions>

This short web article briefly discusses the use of essential questions in the classroom and gives examples of EQs.

How to Craft Questions, handout from conversationcafe.org

The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action
by Eric E. Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs